

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 20, 2010

Her Excellency Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner
President of the Argentine Republic
Buenos Aires, Argentina

Dear Madam President:

We write to respectfully urge your country's delegation to oppose a resolution on "combating defamation of religions" that the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) is expected to consider this fall. Sadly, this misguided resolution, which seeks to protect particular religions, religious symbols, and religious institutions from "defamation" or criticism, would exacerbate rather than solve the very real problems of religious intolerance, discrimination and violence. Specifically, it would threaten individual rights to freedom of religion and expression, and provide international support for domestic blasphemy laws that often lead to human rights abuses.

International human rights law protects individuals, not belief systems. Moreover, the individual right to freedom of religion or belief does not include the right to shield from criticism one's religion or belief. By providing such a shield, the "defamation of religions" concept degrades internationally-guaranteed individual rights in favor of the purported rights of religions. As former UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief Asma Jahangir has explained, freedom of religion "confers a right to act in accordance with one's religion but does not bestow a right for believers to have their religion itself protected from all adverse comment."

Religious intolerance and discrimination are best fought by encouraging respect for the human rights of every individual, rather than by national or international legal prohibitions that silence expression that purportedly "defames" religions. New laws that curtail speech are not the solution. Instead, existing laws and instruments against violence and discrimination based on religion should be fully implemented, and the international community should redouble its efforts to promote mutual understanding, religious tolerance, and respect for human rights and the freedom of expression.

Thankfully, support for the "defamation" resolutions has been steadily eroding. Since 2008, the UNGA and the United Nations Human Rights Council have passed the "defamation" resolutions by only plurality votes. We are confident that this positive movement will continue, and we hope that your country will oppose the resolution and all efforts to establish an international legal principle against "defamation of religions."

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.


Respectfully yours,




ELIOT L. ENGEL
Member of Congress




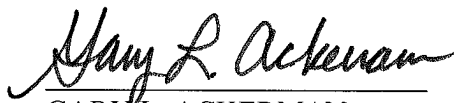
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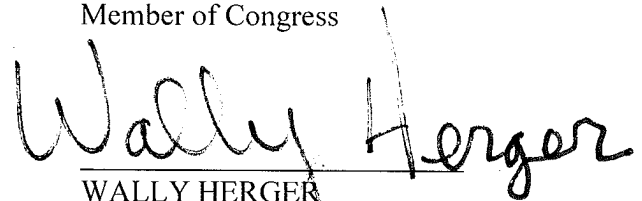

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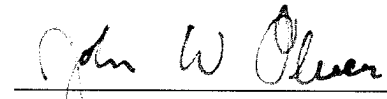

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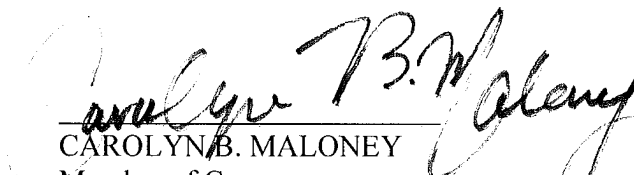

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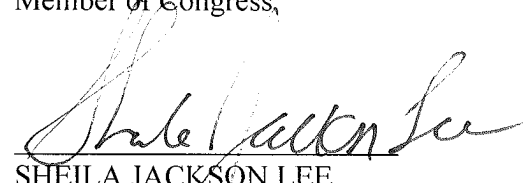

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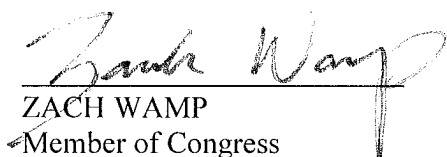

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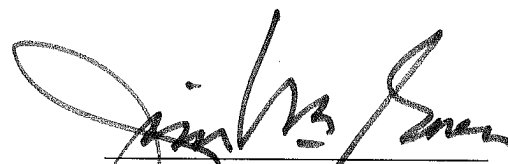

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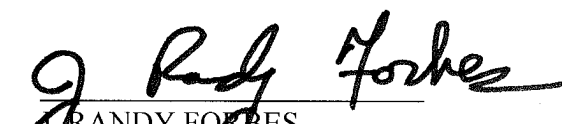

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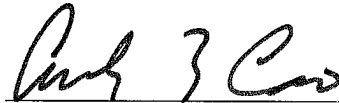
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